



United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

**COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND LAND
MANAGEMENT**



Czech Republic

Enhancing Urban Performance

How effective urban planning can lead to greener urban communities & economies and promote social cohesion

Concept Note

Introduction

The UNECE region is highly urbanized with more than 75% of the population concentrated in urban areas, of which 45% live in medium sized municipalities. Cities are facing a growing number of complex challenges, reduced economic performance, migration, lack of social cohesion and increased unemployment, high environmental impacts and climate change. To encompass this complexity, Governments need to increase urban performance by adopting an approach that integrates different dimensions of urban planning, thus addressing those economic, environmental and social challenges in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

The UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management together with the Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic is organizing a workshop to discuss and review examples and practices of successful integrative approaches to urban planning. The workshop will focus on the main challenges for up-to-date urban planning, ranging from greening the economy to reducing GHG emissions for urban areas, increasing social cohesion and reducing urban poverty. The event is planned to take place on **3-4 May 2010 in Prague, Czech Republic**.

Economic performance

The recent economic crises impacted heavily the housing sector, and drastically reduced investments and projects for urban infrastructures. The construction sector in most countries in the region slowed down. While the crisis limited drastically the size and impact of projects in urban areas, it also offered opportunities to redirect urban growth towards more sustainable paths. Stimulus packages approved in many countries opted to re-boost the economy by focusing on environmentally friendly technologies and activities.

Greening the urban economy implies the reshaping and refocusing of policies, investments, and public spending towards low-carbon and environmentally-friendly sectors like clean technologies, energy efficiency measures in buildings, renewable energies, agriculture and waste management, using natural assets in a sustainable way while preserving ecosystems. In connection to this, it allows creating green jobs in all key economic sectors, like building and construction, transportation, basic industry, agriculture and forestry.

The workshop will discuss how economic changes relate to social and environmental problems, what impact they have on the development of cities, and how planning could provide a tool to better respond to the challenges of a green economy.

Social cohesion

One of the major social problems that countries in the ECE region are experiencing, in particular in EECCA and SEE countries, is difficult access to affordable housing. Since in many countries, there is usually almost no new construction of low rental housing, households with low income have rare access to adequate housing. This often leads to a concentration of poor households in suburban or degraded areas with consequently the emergence of ghettos or an increase in homelessness or informal settlements. For instance, more than 50 million people are living in informal settlements in the ECE region, facing poverty and social exclusion. They lack access to social security and education systems as well as piped water and are exposed to hazards of landslides, flooding and pollution. This is also linked to reduced access to urban services, such as transport, education and health care, crucial to achieve social cohesion.

Governments should find ways to support and integrate disadvantaged groups through economic, financial and social policies, and to increase the support for empowerment as a means to integrate disadvantaged groups into society. Urban planning represents a framework for such empowerment, particularly at a local level.

The workshop will look at how urban planning could redirect growth, promote mixes of uses, social cohesion and facilitate access to services. Urban plans can often provide a tool to overcome segregation, increase access to services and make the city a fair place to live in. Public participation in planning will also be considered, as an important means to reflect all actors and concerned voices in the process of shaping neighborhoods and towns.

Environment

Even though the quality of life in many cities has improved over the last decade, air and water pollution as well as energy consumption and the lack of green living spaces are central urban problems to be addressed. Moreover, it is now clear that reduction of CO² emissions has to take place in urban areas, since these are the main emitters. Reductions will have to come from transport, but also mainly buildings and in particular the residential sector. It is clear for instance that energy efficiency in housing leads to environmental benefits. This is however only one element of an integrated approach to urban planning which needs to be completed by other elements in order to obtain sustainable results. This cannot be achieved without governments implementing financial and administrative systems that promote greener cities.

This includes adequate urban planning, for instance to reduce urban sprawl, increase green and pedestrian areas, increase the density of built areas.

A number of cities in the ECE region can serve as an interesting experience. A comprehensive policy approach implemented by the city of Vienna for instance led to a regional subsidies programme which supports renovation of 10,000 dwellings a year, saving up to 75% of their energy use. A Central Asian Mountain Partnership's Project in Kyrgyzstan focuses on the use of dried reeds to reduce energy consumption by 65%.

The workshop will review successful examples of planning for Climate Neutral Cities, identify the common challenges, planning tools and practices for reducing GHG emission in cities and to increase their overall sustainability.

Key Questions

How to connect economic performance, social cohesion and the environment in urban planning? What are the key issues to be addressed?

How to develop integrative policies and plans and tools to implement them?

How housing and its support can serve as an efficient tool for social cohesion?

How can urban planning prevent residential segregation?

How to encourage civil society participation?

How to limit the growth of informal settlements and how to overcome them?

How to reduce emissions in built up environment and adapt cities to climate change?

How are land administration, real property data and economic performance connected?

How to create more citizen-friendly communities?

How to promote the transition towards green urban economies?

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